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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3716
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIRUT 001679

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NSC FOR ABRAMS/WERNER/DORAN/SINGH

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/25/2016
TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PTER](#) [PINS](#) [KPAL](#) [LE](#) [SY](#)
SUBJECT: MGLE01: S/CT CRUMPTON MEETING WITH PM SINIORA --
LEBANON IS READY TO BE HELPED

Classified By: Jeffrey Feltman, Ambassador. Reason: Section 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

11. (C) On May 23, S/CT Crumpton met with PM Siniora at Siniora's office in Beirut's Grand Serail. Ambassador Crumpton told the Prime Minister that the USG was prepared to help Lebanon as it moved to strengthen its institutions through a Lebanese process. He expressed USG condolences upon the death of a Lebanese soldier at the hands of Palestinian extremists, and added that national unity now would be strengthened if Lebanon responded to the Palestinian attack. PM Siniora said that he would like to delay a GOL response to the attacks in an effort to win over Arab public opinion for Lebanon. Lebanon, Siniora said, will have more sympathy and support in the Arab world if it is clearly seen as the victim, not the aggressor. When Ambassador Crumpton suggested that the parliamentary majority and the minority coordinate policy on Palestinian and Hizballah's arms, Siniora said he did exactly that earlier in the day. End summary.

REGION EAGER FOR PEACE AND DEMOCRACY

12. (C) Ambassador Crumpton, accompanied by the Ambassador and PolChief, met with Prime Minister Fouad Siniora to discuss U.S. counterterrorism support to Lebanon. Siniora was philosophical in his approach to USG cooperation, outlining how the two countries could capitalize on shared values to shape the bilateral relationship. Siniora said that people in the broader region are moved by the Palestinian problem. He recounted how he had sent a delegation of his ministers into the Palestinian camps to see conditions there. This was, according to Siniora, the first time an official Lebanese delegation visited the camps, and not with guns, but to find ways to help. He said that progress on a comprehensive peace in the region would alleviate the tensions that feed terrorism.

13. (C) Siniora said that the present troubles in Iraq and elsewhere have created fear in the region. People feel threatened by terrorism, and want stability as well as democracy for their nations. But, these political changes must be begun by internal forces and pushed forward by a civil society made stronger by internet technology and other improvements in international communications. Siniora also supported the idea of the free movement of people as well as ideas. He said he was considering a Schengen-style visa for Lebanon and the Gulf countries. This approach to the Gulf

would give Lebanon partners in its efforts to control borders and to fight terrorism. Ambassador Crumpton cautioned Siniora that he needed to make sure that any such visa system included only countries with similar border policies and procedures.

GOL WILL NOT RESPOND TO PALESTINIAN
ATTACKS WITH ARMS

14. (C) Raising the issue of armed Palestinian factions, Ambassador Crumpton said the USG is willing to help Lebanon enforce its sovereignty. He expressed condolences for the death of the Lebanese soldier killed in the May 17 clash with the Fatah-Intifada militia in the Biga' valley. Ambassador Crumpton asked how Lebanon would respond to this attack. PM Siniora said that he did not want to respond immediately to the provocation at the hands of the pro-Syrian militia. Siniora favored a strategy of apparent inactivity while he won over Arab public opinion for the Lebanese cause.

15. (C) Siniora said that Syria and its supporters were trying to portray Lebanon as alarmist in identifying Syrian interference. To illustrate this maneuver, Siniora said that on the evening of the shooting, some fifty fighters infiltrated into Lebanon from Syria. When Lebanon announced this, the pro-Syrian forces and press denounced the GOL by saying that the trucks in question were carrying produce, not fighters. Siniora later corrected the record, but those opposed to him inside and outside of Lebanon attempted to make him look ridiculous. Now, by not responding, Siniora felt he could convince other Arabs that Lebanon was in fact the victim of a Syrian-engineered attack. The obvious fact of Syrian culpability will embarrass those still allied with Syria inside Lebanon. "Syria is becoming tense," Siniora

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said. Hizballah was also embarrassed by the Palestinian attack, Siniora said. The Shia group cannot play the role of nationalists and allow the army to be attacked by foreign fighters. He thought that his tactics would bear fruit in about a month's time.

ASSISTANCE KEY TO WINNING OVER
THE PALESTINIANS--NOT ARMS

15. (C) Ambassador Crumpton cautioned PM Siniora that inactivity could be taken as weakness, inspiring others to make a victim of Lebanon. As the national dialogue had called for disarming Palestinians outside the camps, the GOL might consider a unified strategy to accomplish the disarmament. Siniora said that he had spoken with PLO leader Abu Mazen while both men were in Egypt for the World Economic Summit. Siniora told the Palestinian leader that Lebanon needed PLO support to deal with renegade Palestinians. He acknowledged that Abu Mazen didn't have control over the PFLP-GC and the Fatah-Intifada group. However, the PLO would be instrumental in turning Palestinian public opinion against the two groups. The Lebanese needed the cover of Abu Mazen's support. Siniora said he hoped to engage the Palestinian people in order to render the radical groups harmless.

16. (C) Ambassador Crumpton said the USG wanted the Lebanese national dialogue to succeed in answering the needs of Lebanese. A firm response to the Palestinian attacks would show the international community that Lebanon is prepared to help itself. We could then get more support for assistance programs for Lebanon. Siniora explained that the living conditions of the Palestinians in Lebanon could be the key to disarming the factions. He made a plea for international support, channeled through UNRWA, for providing basic humanitarian needs for Palestinians. The GOL visit to the camps had created an opportunity for Siniora to redefine the internal political debate about the Palestinians. Now he recognized that he must capitalize on the growing feeling

that Lebanese must help the Palestinians here.

¶7. (C) Siniora said that his government had accomplished much on the counterterrorism scene. He said he regarded coordination as the most important element for the Lebanese security forces. The Internal Security Forces (ISF) were working in close cooperation with the U.S. and others. The recently created CT cell within the ISF was fully operational and effective. He added that the political opposition to his government was trying to torpedo his efforts, but he had made progress.

WE WILL COORDINATE HIZBALLAH/PALESTINIAN
POLICY WITH THE OPPOSITION

¶8. (C) Turning once more to the national dialogue, Ambassador Crumpton asked the PM who he intended to designate in responding to Hassan Nasrallah's national defense plan presented at the dialogue's most recent session. Siniora said he had assigned Samir Ja'ja', leader of the Lebanese Forces and an ally of the governing March 14 coalition, to coordinate a response to Nasrallah. (Note: Ja'ja' is a former militia leader and not a professional military man. However, he has expressed an interest in filling, or controlling, the defense portfolio in a future cabinet -- an ambition that, given Ja'ja's murderous civil war past, would horrify many LAF officers. End note.) The Prime Minister said he had asked the Army leadership for ideas on Hizballah's possible role in national defense. He described the responses from the Army to date as "meager." He said it would take two or three weeks before he and his colleagues came up with well-developed ideas on how to respond to Nasrallah.

¶9. (C) Commenting on Nasrallah's position, Siniora said he had already ruled out the possibility of consensus for any option of integrating the Hizballah fighters into the Army or allowing for a single command for all resistance forces. He said that he did not foresee any significant advance on these issues during the next session of the dialogue. Progress might take months. But Siniora was reassured by the fact that no dialogue participant wishes to be seen as torpedoing the talks. Siniora believes that Hizballah is nervous, uncertain of its political future, and sensitive to changes in the region. That nervousness will be an advantage for the Mach 14 movement.

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¶10. (C) The PM said he thought Michel Aoun would be embarrassed by the Hizballah defense strategy. Aoun, the former General, will not be able to support Hizballah, but his link to them makes it impossible for him to distance himself from their actions. Siniora said it was important for the majority to facilitate Aoun's retreat away from his alliance with Hizballah.

¶11. (C) Ambassador Crumpton acknowledged that Hizballah has a complex role inside Lebanon, serving as both a social support network and an armed militia. He said the USG knows that Hizballah is training Shia militia in Iraq. Siniora asked about a newspaper story indicating that Hizballah cells were identified in New York. Ambassador Crumpton said there were Hizballah support cells inside the U.S. and elsewhere. This underscores the need for Lebanon to develop a unified, coordinated position on Hizballah's arms. Ambassador Crumpton suggested that the GOL might speak with the opposition about creating a joint position. The Ambassador told the PM that Michel Aoun, in an earlier meeting, made clear his openness to coordination with the parliamentary majority on the issue of Hizballah and Palestinian arms. In response, PM Siniora smiled, and said "I did that this morning." Siniora claimed that one of Jumblatt's people would make contact with Aoun to work out a common approach for the national dialogue.

COMMENT

¶12. (C) Siniora's passivity-by-design regarding the death of a LAF corporal from Palestinian gunfire is disturbing. As Minister of Defense Elias Murr points out to us constantly, LAF morale is in need of a boost (an argument Murr uses to press for increased military aid), yet Siniora seems to miss the point: the PM does not exhibit (or even seem to feel) the outrage that should be natural over the death of a corporal by a foreign-funded and directed gunfire.

¶13. (C) We know Siniora's argument: he got burned in what passes for Arab public opinion when he publicly rejected the so-called "Saudi initiative" back in January. Siniora has been working ever since to woo the Arabs back to Lebanon's side. He wants it to be clear across the region that Lebanon is being "reasonable" and that Lebanon is the victim, not the aggressor. But we also remember Siniora's words in Washington, that Lebanon will win more support if Lebanon first helps itself. Siniora has Lebanese public opinion on his side when it comes to dealing with Palestinian militants, and we believe he lost an opportunity by not using the death of the corporal to rally public support -- consistent with the National Dialogue's conclusions -- for some kind of action against the Palestinian bases.

FELTMAN